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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the social network concept in sociolinguistics is examined from the perspective of language variation. This perspective is taken to gain insight into the actual importance of networks in speech communities and a more thorough understanding of a sociolinguistic concept that has drawn increasing attention in recent years. First, the relevance of sociolinguistic research is examined; next, some aspects of micrological research are highlighted. Research carried out in four communities in Flanders is reported, and its findings are interpreted in light of the standardization process of Dutch and in the more general framework of the network concept. (Author/MSE)

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NETWORKS, LANGUAGE VARIATION AND THE RELEVANCE OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC RESEARCH[1]

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Résumé / Abstract

Cette communication examine de façon critique le concept de réseau social en tant qu'outil d'analyse des variations langagières et comme moyen d'approfondir notre compréhension des mécanismes sociolinguistiques. Dans une première partie la sociolinguistique est critiquée pour avoir failli à sa tâche, qui est d'expliquer les relations de la structure linguistique avec la structure sociale. La seconde partie décrit un projet de recherche à petite échelle qui met en rapport un certain nombre de variables sociolinguistiques avec des variables indépendantes telles que le sexe, l'âge, les catégories socioprofessionnelles, l'histoire langagière et les réseaux sociaux. Dans une troisième partie le caractère non-prédictif des rapports entre la structure linguistique et la structure sociale est imputé à l'interaction entre les règles constitutives et les règles régulatrices. La conclusion discute les implications de ces deux concepts empruntés à SEARLE pour la théorie sociolinguistique.

> *"If social science is the answer, what is the question?"*
> (GARFINKEL 1981: vii).

0. Introduction

The aim of this contribution is to look at the network concept from the view point of language variation. In so doing it is hoped to get a deeper insight into the actual importance of networks in speech communities and, consequently, to get a more thorough understanding of a sociolinguistic concept which in recent years has drawn a considerable amount of attention. Moreover, it is hoped that this insight will enable us to enlarge our general views of sociolinguistic research. The latter seems necessary since sociolinguistics has been submitted to a number of critical appraisals recently (see e.g. DITTMAR, 1983; ROMAINE, 1984; MUYSKEN, 1984), which in one case went as far as questioning the relevance of sociolinguistics altogether (cf. MUYSKEN, 1984). In the light of this evolution and the specific character of the research which will

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be presented here, it seemed reasonable to provide some contribution to the wider debate, the more so, since many critical remarks bear on methodological aspects, and the study of networks cannot be carried out without reference to methodology. In the first part the relevance of sociolinguistic research will be discussed. Then some aspects of micrological research will be highlighted. Third, there will be a report on research carried out in four communities in Flanders. Its findings will be interpreted in the light of the standardization process of Dutch and in the more general light of the relevance of the network concept.

1. The relevance of Sociolinguistic Research

Most of the critical appraisal sociolinguistics has been subject to has dealt with aspects of variation, which is a relatively new term for linguistics. Considering the evolution of linguistics the least one can say about variation is that it has not been a popular theme throughout the history of the field. This can be explained partly because its importance has been denied, partly because the facts themselves were poorly understood and partly because of the lack of methodological tools to study it. These problems are not only confined to linguistics, however, but extend to all social sciences. For sociolinguistics, of course, the study of variation is one of the most intriguing phenomena and at the same time one of the most difficult to deal with.

Recently an overview appraising twenty years of sociolinguistic research has been published by MUYSKEN (1984) in Dutch. Since many points he raises concern the theme of this conference his ideas are summarized below. For MUYSKEN "the status of sociolinguistics at this moment is by no means self-evident" (MUYSKEN 1984: 259)[2], because, as his major argument goes, an elaborated theory of sociolinguistics is still non-existent and, as far as he is concerned, neither will nor can be developed. To him this is the cause of a stagnation which has led to what he calls an "escape from sociolinguistics". This escape, and the inability to construct an elaborate theory, is further provoked by the fact that contact between language structure and social structure is, according to him, superficial in that it only touches on the outer layers of both systems. With the latter statement MUYSKEN has questioned the entire research area of sociolinguistics since a vision of a science dispersing itself into other research fields is presented. In Figure 1 an attempt is made to illustrate the escape from sociolinguistics according to MUYSKEN.

Area of research	Attention previously went to:	now 'escaped into the research of:
code-switching and code-mixing	socio-stylistics	syntax and psycho-linguistics
natural second language learning in adults	social relationships	universal cognitive factors
interaction analysis	social role of interactors	universal aspects of textual coherence, general pragmatic principles
variation	social relationships	statistical procedures
pronunciation differences	social relationships	speech production research
spoken language	social conditioning	interaction of structural options of the system

Figure 1: The "escape" from sociolinguistics of six research areas according to MUYSKEN (1984).

Let us consider in more detail the study of variation which is claimed to have abandoned the study of social relationships in favour of an increasing attention to "formal possibilities at presenting variation" and to "statistical prodecures to track down variation" (MUYSKEN 1984: 266). He refers to SANKOFF's collection Linguistic Variation (1978) to illustrate his point but he might also have referred to LABOV's collection Locating Language in Time and Space (1980b), since both publications pertain to the same subject field with approximatively the same methodology in mind. While it is true that the vast majority of contributions in these volumes indeed mention sophisticated statistical techniques and while I would like to join those who warn against the absolute relevance of statistical procedures, this does not necessarily mean that the use of statistical procedures implies that it is the sole focus of attention. In both volumes statistics is used as a help in the study of variation within social contexts. It is far from clear how in this example one can speak of an escape from sociolinguistics. It would be fairer to say that a deepening has taken place trying to determine in a more

detailed way the intricate relationship between language and social phenomena. MUYSKEN has treated this research area in a far too simplified way and the same could be said for the other fields he distinguishes.

But let us for the moment give MUYSKEN the benefit of the doubt and suppose that his general arguments are right. This would mean that either sociolinguistics is dispersing into sub-fields, or that attention to social aspects of language use is decreasing because this study is more and more considered as irrelevant and, at best, can only produce superficial results. This would explain a renewed interest into formalizing and universalizing factors. Even if this were true we must notice that sociolinguistics did not pass unnoticed. It is thanks to such sociolinguistic key terms as code-switching and code-mixing that a non-empirical, normative theory like transformational grammar (see VAN DE CRAEN, to appear) could be enriched (cf. WOOLFORD, 1983). It is thanks to sociolinguistic research into aspects of language variation that new branches of science, such as sociophonetics and the study of sociocognitive factors, could develop. It is thanks to sociolinguistics that the idea of universal pragmatics has been put forward. In other words, if indeed sociolinguistics should disperse into a number of subdisciplines it is clear that it has influenced all these disciplines and in most cases has given them a new impetus.

Let us now suppose MUYSKEN is wrong. This would mean that his central idea, namely, the fact that a penetrating sociolinguistic theory is impossible because of the superficial relationship between language structure and social structure, is fundamentally wrong. At this point I would like to add that this does not mean that in some ways the development of sociolinguistics has not given cause to an attitude such as MUYSKEN is advocating. Indeed, there are many bad things to say about the poor theorizing of sociolinguistics. This is even illustrated by MUYSKEN's argumentation itself. Consider, for instance the way in which one of his arguments is formulated: language structure and social structure are related only in the outer layers. What is meant by these terms? Let us refer to Figure 2.

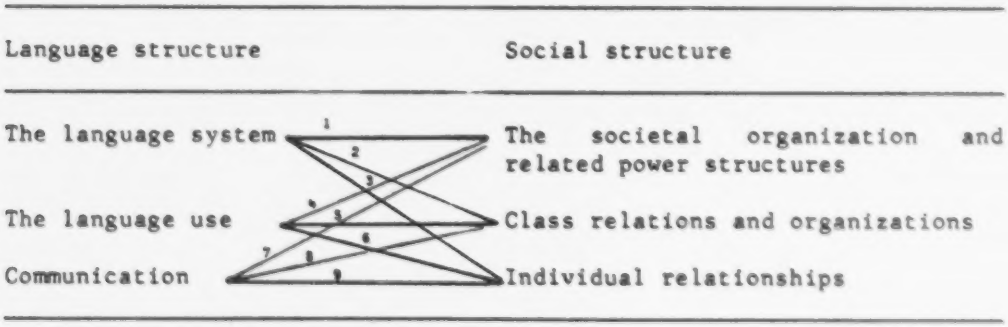

Figure 2: Possible definitions of the terms of language structure and social structure

On the left hand side are some current definitions of what can be meant by language structure while on the right hand side the same is done for social structure. In checking which cross rerefences can justify empirically founded statements only the third term on each side seems to be relevant (9 see figure 2). The other possibilities either bear no relation to each other or they are formulated too openly. For instance, what are we supposed to imagine as the relation between the language system and societal forms of organization (1), or between the former and individual relationships (3)? The relationship between language use and social class (5) is only promising in so far as by social class is meant the fact of belonging to a certain class and not class organization which is absolutely arbitrary and bears no relevance whatsoever to language phenomena in the sense that neither one of them can explain the other. Nevertheless, for a long time, definitions of sociolinguistics have claimed to study language in relation to society (cf. HUDSON, 1980) without considering the implications and the complexity of the key terms used in this definition. In this respect MUYSKEN's ideas only reflect the looseness of some sociolinguistic ideas. No wonder frustration creeps in and belief in the power of the paradigm gets lost.

A completely different picture arises if we take the study of communication between individual members of a society as the starting-point for theorizing and research. Then it becomes clear that it is not just the outer layer of human development that is touched, but the very nucleus, since the way in which people communicate is, among other things, a determining and moulding factor of individual development at different levels. Consider the following words by TEN HOUTEN (1982).

> "(T)he modes of thought now known to be associated with lateralization of function in the human brain, as well as the notions of cognitive style and dialectical thought, are influenced by positions and practices in the social world. The most central theme that can be detected in such diffuse sociological theorizing, as well as in studies of cognitive syle is, that *the structure of social dominance influences the development of thought and contributes to its structure*" (50, my italics).

The above insight which is now beginning to be shared by scholars from various disciplines, referring to people with such diverse backgrounds as G.H. MEAD, SAPIR, SULLIVAN, BÜHLER, etc., strongly suggests that the study of the relation between language and society is much more complicated than previous sociolinguistic hypotheses thought. This interactional approach, which, by the way, runs through this century like a continuous thread — though never quite popular — predicts the importance of interaction as a moulding tool for the individual, hence doing away with a number of all too simply

formulated statements. Towards the idea that the relation between language structure and social structure only involves the outer layers of the system a two-folded reaction should be adopted. If it suggests that sociolinguistic research has not been able to touch more than just the outer layer of the relationship between the two systems we can partly agree, but if this statement is meant in an absolute way it ignores the far-reaching and moulding role of communication and interaction processes and is, therefore, wrong.

Let us now turn to the problems involved with the interactional approach as I will call it. Empirical research within this approach has seriously been hampered by a number of seemingly contradictory factors involving the relationship between micro- and macrological elements. While it could be demonstrated easily enough that individual social meaning, for instance, comes about in small interaction patterns, starting as it were right after birth, it was far more difficult to see how societal meaning or social order came about: "social order is produced in a microcosm of daily interactions in different situations and (more or less) institutionalized contexts. Verbal interactions and social order are produced in a mutual (reciprocal) process" (DITTMAR, 1983: 248). Yet, given this microcosm where does macrological social order stem from or in ethnomethodological terms "given indexicality, how is social order possible?" (EGLIN 1980: 40, also cited in DITTMAR, 1983). One might wonder even more about this considering variation phenomena, since this causes the microcosm to adopt a nearly kaleidoscopic look. We are thus left with a sociological or sociolinguistic paradox, as DITTMAR (1983) states,

> "the constitutional processes of social order can only be revealed by scrutinizing in depth daily social interactions on the micro level using the documentary method of recipient design; however, they can only be understood by taking into account the broader underlying macrostructure of societal values, norms, and ideologies that have their materialistic and historical source in the socio-political actions of human beings and are unavoidable presuppositions and preconceived knowledge of any contextual interpretation" (250).

I do not think, however, that we are making a major leap forward by stating that micro and macrological aspects are complementary as FISHMAN (1972) and DITTMAR (1983) do, since we still do not know then what the exact relationship is between the two. In the last part of this contribution I will add some new material to this problem while discussing some of the results of a research project studying variation in various networks in four Flemish communities. Let me now temporarily skip the discussion on variation and for the time being settle for the following. The relevance of sociolinguistic research is to be found in the fact that the study of the relation between communicative or interaction phenomena and social behaviour

offers an insight into the moulding influence of these processes on individuals and to some extent into larger communities or societies.

2. Sociolinguistics and Ethnography

2.0 Introduction

The problem of empirical testing of large scale theories and the sometimes meagre results coming out of such experiences has for some been a cause to reflect on research techniques. Small scale or micrological research by means of ethnographic techniques became the answer. The underlying idea is that ethnographic techniques will provide a much more penetrating — though less general — picture of (language) behaviour. In this section the partial results of a research project on some phonic aspects of Dutch as it is spoken in Flanders will be presented applying ethnographic techniques and the network concept. Following MILROY (1980) we were curious to see in what way networks would interfere in the variation of phonic aspects as well as to verify the influence of other independent variables, such as age, sex, style, SES and the linguistic background of the network members.

2.1 The network structures

Research as described above presupposes the gathering of information by means of, among other things, participant observation (cf. SAVILLE-TROIKE, 1982; HAMMERSLEY & ATKINSON, 1983). This means that the researcher depends to a large extent on his own ability to keep meaningful interaction going. Consequently, and perhaps paradoxically, some interactive patterns are impossible because close interaction which is the result of the participant observation technique, only allows for certain kinds of communication. On the other hand, one gets access to people in a way traditional research could only dream of. Let me give an example.

In most parts of Flanders where the research was carried out dialect is spoken in a variety of ways, perhaps with the exception of the area surrounding Brussels. While in some communities the problem is one of gaining access to the vernacular, in Flanders the problem is reversed especially when use is made of participant observation. Gaining access to the standard or formal language is hampered by this technique since close interaction means informal speech and it is just impossible to switch to formal speech without destroying the carefully built friendly relationships.

We have infiltrated four communities respectively in Elewijt, a village between Brussels and Mechelen, Halle, a small town in the southwestern part of Brussels, Geraardsbergen, a small town practically on the border of the provinces of Brabant and East-Flanders

and Brussels. In all cases the field workers originated from the places chosen, they spoke the dialect fluently and they had many contacts in the community although none of them originally belonged to the network under study. In Figure 3 the kind of networks, the total number of members and the total number of members who actually participated in the research, are summarized. Figure 4 gives some details as to the age of the network members as well as some indication of their general SES.

Town	Kind of network	Overall number of members	Research participants
Elewijt	Neighbours	8	6 (3m; 3f)
Halle	Organized neighbourhood ass.	15	10 (4m: 6f)
Geraards-bergen	Women's club	14	7 (-m; 7f)
Brussels	Old age pensioners	6	6 (1m; 5f)

Figure 3: Kind of network, the overall number of network members and the number of research participants.

Town	Age range	Remarks regarding SES
Elewijt	19 to 64	Lower and middle class
Halle	14 to 64	Middle class
Geraardsbergen	31 to 63	Lower middle class
Brussels	54 to 80	Lower class

Figure 4: Age and general social position of network member concerned.

In two cases the group consisted of neighbours (Elewijt and Halle) one group was a club (Geraardsbergen), while the Brussels network consisted of a more or less random group of older people. In two of these cases the network was hierarchically structured (Halle and Geraardsbergen) with a chairperson, a secretary and treasurer. In all cases one can speak of open networks in GUMPERZ's (1982) sense, and in all cases a number of sub-groups can be distinguished which formed closer networks, e.g. families.

It is also important to have some idea of the network density, because this figure may indicate the potential weight of communication within the network. The higher the density, the more homogeneous the spreading of norms and values might be expected. However, intense communication and information transmission should be evaluated carefully since relationships between individuals not necessarily belonging to the same network may have an even greater impact. Therefore, not just the density but also the multiplexity or the degree of overlap of roles (cf. BOISSEVAIN 1974) is important, while it gives an idea of the intensity of communication within the network.

For the calculation of both density and multiplexity BOISSEVAIN's (1974) and MILROY's (1980) formulae were used:

$$D = \frac{100\ Na}{\frac{1}{2}N\ (N-1)}\% \qquad M = \frac{Nm\ 100}{N}\%$$

Na stands for the actual total number of links and N for the total number of persons, whereas Nm stands for the number of multiplex links. In both cases the researcher was excluded from the computation. Figure 5 summarizes the results for the groups studied.

Town	D(%)	M(%)
Elewijt	46	85
Halle	100	22
Geraardsb.	95	15

Figure 5: Density and multiplexity scores for three network groups.

For the Brussels network the calculation turned out to be irrelevant since the group of six (see Figure 3) in fact consisted of two smaller networks of two and four people, one family and four other members connected in such a way that these scores could no longer be relevantly interpreted. It is interesting to compare the scores of the other towns in terms of density and multiplexity. Although the Elewijt network showed a relatively high density, the multiplexity score showed much stronger coherence than in the other

two groups. The opposite was true for Halle and Geraardsbergen where an optimal density in fact was balanced by a low multiplexity score. Nevertheless figures such as these need to be considered in relation to the significance for language behaviour. Since the multiplexity score came about based on family relationships they are only relevant in so far as it can be proved that family relation does indeed influence language behaviour.

2.2 Method

In all cases a large range of recordings in different contexts was aimed at with as many members of the network as possible. This was not always possible. Three styles could be distinguished: informal talks with the researcher and among network members, more formal conversations with the researcher and among network members, and the most formal style, which was deliberately presented in an artificial way, reading. The informal conversation did not pose any problems, as the researchers were very well (Elewijt) or rather well (the other cases) acquainted with the network members. In Elewijt and Halle the researchers paid social calls on the informants, while in Geraardsbergen they participated in the ongoing activity, namely the staging of a play. In the Brussels pensioners' restaurant the researcher pretended he was a member of the staff. As a result of these relations it was relatively easy to get material from informal conversations. However, in all cases it turned out to be impossible to get formal conversations among network members themselves and rather difficult to get formal material from conversations with the researcher. For this case the conversations from the acquaintance period were used. Figure 6 gives a general overview of the kind of material that was gathered.

Town	Informal speech		Formal speech		Reading
	am. Nwm.	w. res.	am. Nwm.	w. res.	
Elewijt	x	x	-	-	x
Halle	x	-	-	x	x
Geraardsb.	x	x	-	x	x
Brussels	x	x	-	-	-

Figure 6: Overview of the material gathered in four networks (am. NwM = among network members; w. res. = with researcher).

2.3 Analysis

Since our interest went to aspects of variation and standardization on the phonic level and the possible role of network relationships we decided to study a number of variables which were sensitive for variation and standardization. Figure 7 summarizes these variables per community. In this paper only three variables will be discussed. This choice is based on the fact that they represent three kinds of variation: (1) system constrained variation with (t), (2) phonetic interference variation with (h), since this variable does not occur in the dialect of the places studied, and (3) (a) which is much stigmatized in most Brabantic and East Flanders dialects. Figure 8 shows the actual phonetic value of each of these three variables.

Town	Variables							
Elewijt	(a)	(t)	(h)	(e)	(n)			
Halle		(t)	(h)		(n)	(ŋ)	(sX)	
Geraardsb.	(a)	(t)	(h)			(ŋ)	(sX)	(r)
Brussels	(a)	(t)		(e)		(ŋ)		

Figure 7: Total group of variables studied in four network communities.

Town	Elewijt	Halle	Geraardsb.	Brussels
Variable				
(a)	[a:ɹ], [a:] [a], [ɔ]	-	[aᵋ:], [a] [ă], [e:], [a:ɹ]	[a], [a:], [aᵎ] [aᵘ], [aᵊ], [ɛ:]
(h)	Ø, [h]	Ø, [h]	Ø, [h], [g], [X]	o
(t)	Ø, [t], [d]	Ø, [t], [d]	Ø, [t], [d] [tʃ], [dʒ]	Ø, [t], [d]

Figure 8: Actual phonetic variation for three variables in four network communities.

In Halle (a) was not investigated because no variation was found and in Brussels lack of formal material prevented the study of (h).

2.4 Results

For each of the variables in Figure 8 we checked to which degree the independent variables sex, age, SES, linguistic background and the (sub)-network had an influence in three styles. Figure 9 summarizes the general results. The term significant should here be interpreted as meaning that the found variation between styles is significant in relation to the various independent variables. For Brussels only one style could be studied. Each network was divided into clusters, in most cases family or blood relations, so that the networks were not mutually compared but the sub-networks.

Summarizing Figure 9 per community the following observations stand out. Elewijt. In the informal style the realization of (a) is significant as compared to age, sex and network differences. In the formal style SES also turns out to be significant. The realization of (h) is sex-sensitive but not in the way we might have expected. In this group men appear more norm-conscious than women. The other results are as might expected: the younger the informant and the higher the level of education, the more standard language variation is produced. Halle. Age and sex are significant in the realization of (h) both in formal conversation and in reading. In the informal field (t) is age-sensitive: the older the informants, the less standard variation is likely to be produced. Also reading is influenced by sex and age and, as far as (h) is concerned, also by SES and the network. Geraardsbergen. In the informal style the linguistic background of the network members was important to the variation of (a). As for the more formal style age is significant and in the case of (t) SES. Brussels. In the informal style the variation of (a) is significant with respect to age, linguistic background and the network; as for (t) background and network were significant.

2.5 Discussion

2.5.0 Introduction

In the following the independent variables will be discussed separately. Then these results will be placed against a broader background in which will be discussed aspects of variation and linguistic and social rules.

2.5.1 Sex

In the two communities where sex could be studied meaningfully, sex sensitivity was found. In Halle it was seen that in those cases

Styles		Informal			Formal			Reading		
Variables		(a)	(h)	(t)	(a)	(h)	(t)	(a)	(h)	(t)
Sex	E	0.05	ns	ns	0.05	ns	ns	ns	0.05	ns
	H	-	ns	ns	-	0.01	0.05	-	0.01	ns
	G	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	B	-	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age	E	0.05	ns	ns	0.01	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
	H	-	ns	0.05	-	0.05	ns	-	0.01	ns
	G	ns	ns	ns	ns	0.01	0.01	ns	0.01	ns
	B	0.01	0	ns	0	0	0	0	0	0
SES	E	ns	ns	ns	0.01	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
	H	-	ns	ns	-	ns	ns	-	0.01	-
	G	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	0.01	ns	ns	ns
	B	-	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0
Linguistic background	E	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	H	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	G	0.05	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
	B	0.01	0	0.05	0	0	0	0	0	0
Network	E	0.05	ns	ns	0.05	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
	H	-	ns	ns	-	ns	ns	-	0.01	ns
	G	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
	B	0.01	0	0.05	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 9 : General results for three variables in three styles matched with six independent variables ("-" means irrelevant with respect to the material, "0" means not investigated, "ns" non-significant, 0.05 and 0.01 mean $p < 0.05$ or 0.01).

where significant differences were registered women were more norm-conscious than men while in Elewijt the reverse was found. This can be explained in the sense that in Elewijt the men were generally younger and had a higher level of education than the women. In other words in so far as this still needed confirmation sex does not provide absolute differences but is interfered with by factors such as age and SES.

2.2.2 Age

In all cases variation toward the standard language decreases in proportion with age: the younger the subjects, the more standard language variation is produced, even when comparing fifty year olds with eighty year olds. This, of course, coincides with the idea that aspects of language change are closely related to generation differences, at least in the societal environments under investigation.

2.5.3 SES

Social economic status and educational level which was implied by this gave relatively few significant results. This is not surprising. In Flanders the use of dialect is as yet not related to SES. The dialect can be used in a variety of situations quite independent of status aspects. The fact that this situation is rapidly changing does not, of course, affect the results under discussion here. The situation in Flanders can be described using the conceptual distinction between macro- and microdiglossia (cf. BERRUTO, 1984). Macrodiglossia is the situation where there is a great amount of overlap in the functional domains between the standard language and the dialect, whereas microdiglossia is, of course, the opposite. These terms refer to the roles of dialect and the way dialect is spread and they may be brought in connection with the "supreme language" hypothesis (cf. BAETENS BEARDSMORE, 1983). The result is a considerable amount of linguistic interference and less chance that significant differences will be found.

2.5.4 Linguistic background

In as far as this factor was studied it appears to play a role in informal language use but again perhaps not in the way some of the literature seems to indicate. The chairwoman of the women's club in Geraardsbergen, for instance, originally did not speak the local dialect. Even though she was clearly the central figure in the network she tried hard to accommodate her speech to the local characteristics. Now this seems to run contrary to LABOV's (1980a) suggestion that the central figure of a network exerts linguistic influence upon the others. In this case linguistic accommodation is clearly seen as a prerequisite for the leading role.

2.5.5 Network

As was mentioned before each network was divided into clusters. For Elewijt these clusters ran parallel with age and SES. Moreover, a high multiplexity score was found. The stigmatized (a) significance is a clear indication of this. In Halle similar clusters were found but they were significant only for (h) in the reading style. The material from Geraardsbergen showed no significant variation in network clusters since the composition was rather homogeneous. The Brussels material showed network sensitivity but this may be due to the rather unbalanced distribution of the sub-networks.

One might say that networks seem as important to language variation as the other independent variables. I am not inclined to consider them as more important and it is certainly wrong to consider network relations as the sole cause — if cause at all — of language variation and/or languare change. In this respect I would like to refer to ROMAINE (1984) who made some very relevant remarks in this connection bearing an interesting number of theoretical implications. She writes:

> "networks don't explain anything over and beyond what can be explained by reference to the agents who form the networks. A network is a theoretical construct which has no sui generis power to cause people to behave in a particular way. It is, however, legitimate to recognize that an agent's social position and his relations with others may constraint his behaviour on a particular occasion in specific ways" (33).

ROMAINE wished to stress the various interactional factors that influence language behaviour and the necessary hermeneutic approach that goes together with it. Since language variation is determined by individual interpretation strongly influenced, however, by social forces, network concepts will undoubtedly play a role since they largely depend on interactional phenomena. Yet it is hard to predict the range of this influence. These results, as well as other research which made use of the network concept (see MILROY, 1980, ch. 6 for an overview) point to a number of forces pushing in the same direction but apparently these forces do not all push at the same time and equally powerfully. In the next part some reasons for this will be outlined.

2.5.6 Theoretical implications

2.5.6.0 Introduction

In this part an attempt is made to set some of the findings against a broader background. First aspects of linguistic and social rules are discussed, next the implications for sociolinguistic variation are examined.

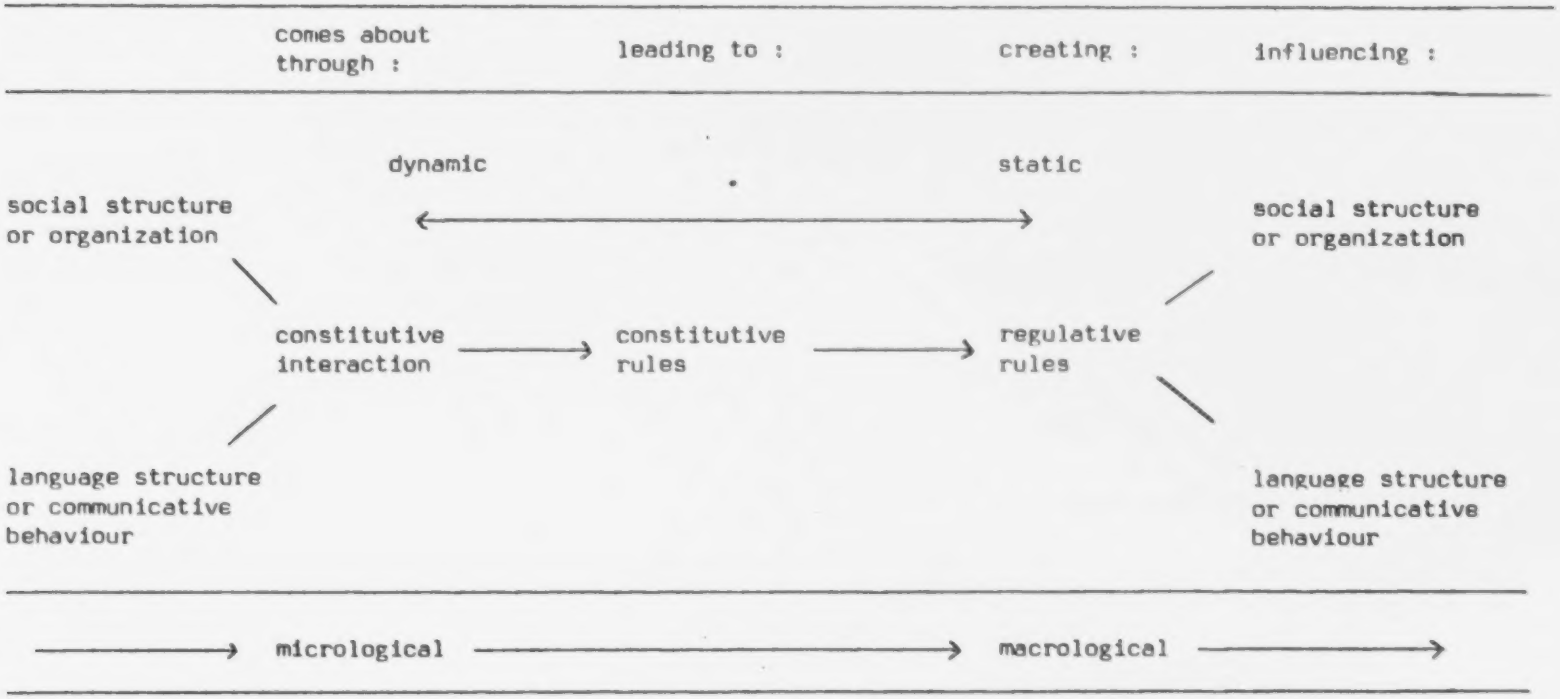

Figure 10 : Relationship between constitutive and regulative rules, social structure and language structure.

2.5.6.1 Social and linguistic rules

SEARLE (1969) has introduced two kinds of rules: regulative rules and constitutive rules. Regulative rules are rules, existing, so to speak, independent of existing forms of behaviour. Constitutive rules "create or define new forms of behaviour". Regulative rules "regulate a pre-existing activity ... logically independent of the rules" while constitutive rules "constitute ... an activity the existence of which is logically dependent on the rules" (SEARLE, 1969: 33-4). Grammar and the organization of society constitute sets of regulative rules while everyday communication and behaviour are examples of constitutive activities.

If we ask ourselves how the regulative rules have come about the only answer seemingly is through constitutive ones. In fact it can be argued that regulative rules are stigmatized constitutive ones. On the other hand since regulative rules are already there, so to speak, they will, of course, influence the nature of constitutive rules. Consider now how the complex relationship between language structure and social structure can be represented (see Figure 10).

Social organization and communicative behaviour both come about through dynamic constitutive interaction leading to constitutive rules which in their turn create static regulative rules. But the latter will again influence the social organization or communicative behaviour. At the same time we can see the role of the micrological and macrological features which respectively belong to the constitutive and regulative activity.

This model is in need of further clarification since it suggests that social organization and communicative behaviour run parallel. What we need is an understanding of the relationship between the components. Let us do this in terms of maximum and minimum individual manipulation possible (cf. ROMAINE, 1984) (see Figure 11).

Language structure or communicative behaviour	Social structure or organization	
regulative	regulative	minimum individual power, least subject to manipulation
phonetics	social institutions	
syntax		
semantics	individual behaviour	maximum individual power, most subject to manipulation
pragmatics		
constitutive	constitutive	

Figure 11: Relationship between language structure and social structure in terms of minimum and maximum individual power.

Communicative behaviour can be conceived of as the interplay between phonetics, syntax, semantics and pragmatics, with phonetics clearly on top as least manageable. Hierarchically one is at first sight inclined to put individual behaviour on the same level as phonetics since it can be considered the counterpart of the smallest element in communicative behaviour. Yet, this is not so in terms of minimum power. In this case the counterpart of the smallest element of the communicative system is with respect to social structure the largest element possible, i.e. social institutions. We see now that the relationship between individual behaviour and phonetics, which was in fact the object of the study presented, is inversely commensurable. This, of course, explains why social factors and linguistic factors do not automatically overlap since the status of the components differ considerably. Furthermore, this means that the relationship between two components, one on the right and one of the left in Figure 11 is influenced by a great many unpredictable factors with a different weighting. This is why such various results with respect to the independent variables were found.

2.5.6.2 Sociolinguistic theory

Referring back to the beginning of this paper it was seen that MUYSKEN thought a sociolinguistic theory impossible since the relationship between social and linguistic aspects is solely superficial. Figure 11 shows some insight in how these layers can be considered. What he calls outer layers should instead be seen as an intricate unpredictable inversely commensurate relationship. From this it is clear that probabilistic approaches must be carefully interpreted. Instead we will have to build small scale approaches first, and interpret them carefully in order to examine how the relationship between constitutive and regulative factors operate. In this respect it is reasonable to abandon the terms "micro" and "macrological" since they do not offer a substantial contribution to the intricate workings of linguistic and societal aspects.

3. The Relevance of Sociolinguistic Research Revisited

This paper has been an attempt, by means of small scale research, to demonstrate that the relationship between language structure and social structure can be seen as an unceasing undulating movement between constitutive and regulative factors of which the direction can seldom be predicted. However, for certain specific situations, such as a standardization process, for instance, the direction of an evolution seems to be irreversibly determined, i.e. provided the situational characteristics do not change dramatically. In Flanders, this process is moving towards an expanding standard language use together with the changing functions of diglossia. Gradually a state of macrodiglossia is abandoned in favour of microdiglossia. In more theoretical terms and using the methaphors of Figure 10, this means

that the constitutive interaction processes are influencing the regulative functions and their interpretation in the direction mentioned above. In this way any sociolinguistic theory is bound to be dynamic and hermeneutical in nature. This to me is not only a contribution to linguistics in particular but to the social sciences in general. Of course, this suggests the construction of socio-linguistic theories as a long and painful process, but let me in this respect remind you of the story of the Arab sheiks who used to throw away their cars each time the tray got full. Let sociolinguists be much more patient.

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2. All translations are by the author (P vdC).

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